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Introduction: Forum on Masculinities, Violences, Variations, and Visions

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Forum

Masculinities: Violences, Variations, and Visions

Editors: Phyllis Baker and Harry Brod

Debate and dialogue within the humanities and social sciences concerning the concept of masculinity/masculinities has been widespread for two decades. We use this edition of a *Universitas Forum* as a way to present and discuss the intriguing theoretical complexity of the concept of masculinity/masculinities. This forum is organized into three sections, focusing respectively on its relationship with the issue of violence, variations in forms and processes, and visions for transformations.

Our original Call for Papers to this issue announced the theme, "The Power of Masculinities." It was not our intention to emphasize the issue of violence in particular, but it is not surprising that we received several essays on the theme of male violence. This issue, after all, has been at the forefront of both scholarship and activism in women's studies and the women's movement since their inception, and the relationships among masculinities, violence and power have been central in these contexts. The contributions in the first section of the Forum look at prevalent configurations and conceptualizations of masculinities as grounded in forms of violence that are situated within specific historical and social contexts and held in place by structural, institutional, and interactional mechanisms. The identified contexts and mechanisms reinforce attributes of emotional detachment, competition, and physical strength. The second group of essays expands what we know about traditional and hegemonic masculinities by identifying instances of variations from normative forms. The work in this section adds to and complicates our understanding of traditional notions of masculinities. The third group of essays not only adds to what we know about masculinities but works toward transforming masculinities by presenting us with alternative enactments of gendered identities.

In the first section, the authors look at some relationships between masculinities and violence. Aggression and violence are often thought to go hand in hand with hegemonic masculinity, and authors in this section present various forms of it. Mullins and Cardwell-Mullins, in "Bad Ass or Punk Ass?: The Contours of Street Masculinity" examine hegemonic and subordinate masculinities through an examination of qualitative interviews with active criminal offenders in Saint Louis, Missouri. Their data illustrate how the elements of the cognitive map of the streets are refractions of mainstream masculinities, while exploring convergences and divergences. They found a "bad ass" masculinity, a hegemonic form, and a "punk ass" masculinity, the primary subordinate form. The next inclusion is a PowerPoint slide show, "Masculinities, Femininities, and Fundamentalisms: Gender Confrontations and Global Conflict", created by Joanne Nagel. In this piece, Nagel combines images and text to argue that organized violence in the global system depends on shared gender cultures, networks, and transactions. She points out that wars are violent confrontations and collaborations among men and man-hoods. Thomas Scheff in "Hypermasculinities and Violence as a Social System" offers a theoretical model for understanding conflict. He argues that the combination of alienation with the repression of vulnerable emotions suggests a biosocial doomsday machine that leads to escalating violence and destructiveness. Scheff considers the way in which both men and women contribute to this system. Finally, in "Men's Quest for Wholeness: The Changing Counseling Needs of *Pakeha* Males" Philip Culbertson looks at a very specific case of violence and masculinity through an

analysis of the high levels of domestic and public violence in New Zealand. One of the most significant factors regarding this violence is the definition of masculinity that *Pakeha* (descendants of white colonial settlers) men have inherited from the culture of their ancestors. There are inherent risks and demands, and a high level of anxiety for men attempting to achieve this masculinity. After a historical treatment of this culturally specific definition of masculinity, Culbertson addresses some therapeutic methodologies appropriate for therapists working with *Pakeha* men who are struggling to find a more holistic identity separate from the traditional expectations of *Pakeha* masculinity.

The next group of articles looks at variations of how masculinities are constructed. In these pieces the authors specifically focus on areas of social life in which the social construction of masculinity takes some interesting turns. Marc Ouellette in "It'll Pass: *NYPD: Blue's* Sipowicz and Mundane Masculinity" presents an analysis of the popular television show's main character, Detective Andy Sipowicz, in which he argues that Sipowicz fulfills the role of the traditional American hero who overcomes adversity through perseverance, self-reliance, and hard work. However, the character undergoes substantive transformation in his social behavior over the years and as the world changes around him. Ouellette argues that the adherence to traditional forms of masculinity may actually be a key to its undoing. The second piece in this group of articles, "The Sorry Sons of The Godfather: Intertextuality, Orality and Diminished Masculinities in *The Sopranos*" by co-editor Harry Brod, probes what we can learn about intergenerational changes and continuities in certain modes of masculine identity and patriarchal authority from an examination of the representation of masculinities in the first season of the HBO television series *The Sopranos* and the contemporaneous film *Analyze This*. Both main characters are situated relative to their fathers as diminished patriarchs whose emasculated masculinities are at the core of their stories. The next selection by Brett Billman, "The Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity," uses the film *Brokeback Mountain* and the widespread growth and use of the term "metrosexual" to argue that in the face of much resistance, hegemonic masculinity has successfully maintained itself through the proliferation of multiple patriarchies. Billman evidences this with an analysis of the enfleshment of masculinity through the physicality of the masculine body. Addressing the oft-heard criticism that men today don't want to grow up, performance artist Jeffery Byrd's *The Dude* confronts adult responsibility by inventing an alter ego that is in perpetual adolescence. Finally, Lynn Nielsen considers the plight of a male in the structurally "female" position of being an elementary school teacher. In "Female Like Me" Nielson situates his essay in previous research and shows how the discourse of men in these positions draws heavily on a discourse of care when defining themselves as teachers.

The final pair of essays looks toward alternative visions of masculinities. The work in this section offers examples of ways in which the notion of masculinities needs to be transformed, not just expanded or clarified. Cory Aragon in "Am I a Man or a Feminist?: Constructing Positive Male Feminist Thought" argues that the seemingly oppositional relationship between the culturally masculine and cultural male, and the positive theory of feminist thought needs continual critical reflection in order to build a theory of male feminist thought that is both male and feminist. In a strikingly different way, "Imagine This': Disengendered Fiction Writers," Susan M. Rochette presents an alternative vision of the masculine through reflection on her own fiction writing and the teaching of fiction writing, in which she uses a masculine voice.

We wish to thank contributors to this issue for their work, Richard Utz for his editorship, and the Graduate College of the University of Northern Iowa for its sponsorship of this forum. Finally, we wish to thank each other, and publicly say what we've privately said to each other, that it's been a pleasure working with us.

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